

**This Week in Congress**

*July 17, 2006*

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

**Kansas Livestock Producers Receive Additional Drought Relief**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) took further steps this week to assist livestock producers suffering from drought. For all Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land approved for emergency haying and grazing, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) will reduce the payment reduction from the previously announced 25 percent to 10 percent. CRP participants who prepaid the 25 percent payment reduction will have the difference refunded.

USDA also announced expanded acreage is eligible to producers who have livestock operations in the previously approved 38 counties. Livestock producers in the 38 eligible Kansas counties may purchase hay or conduct emergency haying or grazing of eligible CRP acres from CRP participants in any county in the expanded area. CRP participants in the expanded area that are not in the 38 approved Kansas counties may not hay or graze CRP for their own use. I expect this provision to create frustration in counties that need to be designated as eligible for haying and grazing.

The additional coverage area expands 150 miles out from any county approved for emergency haying and grazing. Kansas counties previously approved include Cherokee, Cheyenne, Clark, Comanche, Decatur, Edwards, Ellis, Ellsworth, Finney, Ford, Gove, Graham, Grant, Gray, Greeley, Hamilton, Haskell, Hodgeman, Kearny, Lane, Lincoln, Logan, Meade, Morton, Ness, Osborne, Rawlins, Rush, Russell, Scott, Seward, Sherman, Stanton, Stevens, Thomas, Trego, Wallace and Wichita.

I am pleased to see USDA furthering efforts to assist livestock producers in Kansas and across the Great Plains. The reduced payment and expanded haying and grazing areas will benefit many Kansas producers, but there remain several counties that need to be made eligible.

CRP participants should submit applications to their local FSA office. For more information on emergency haying and grazing and to view a map of approved counties and the approximate 150-mile radius eligible for the expanded program, visit the [Conservation section](#) of [FSA's website](#)

. The map is available by  
[clicking here](#)

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### **House Ensures All Americans are Able to Exercise the Right to Vote**

This week, Congress renewed expiring provisions of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965. The right to vote, regardless of race, is fundamental to our democracy. I voted for passage of the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act. This bill will extend provisions through 2032 that protect against practices used to prevent minorities from voting. While our nation has made strides in overcoming prejudice and discrimination, there is still work to be done. The extension of the Voting Rights Act ensures all Americans are able to exercise the right to vote.

### **Meeting with Wichita Veterans Affairs Hospital Director, Tom Sanders**

I met with Tom Sanders, Director of the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wichita, this week to receive an update on hospital operations and patient care services provided to veterans. I encouraged the Wichita VA to move forward on a proposal to establish a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Hutchinson to ensure south central Kansas veterans have better access to VA medical services. I also recommended more staffing at the existing Hays CBOC, including the hiring of a physician, to meet the need for

veterans health services in northwest Kansas. I have been a proponent of establishing CBOCs in Kansas to bring VA care closer to veterans. I appreciate Tom Sanders' dedication to serving veterans and his work in improving access to quality health care.

### **Visiting with the Chancellor of the University of Kansas, Bob Hemenway**

Bob Hemenway, Chancellor of the University of Kansas, was in town this week to provide an update on the progress of the Transportation Research Institute at the University of Kansas. Last year, during consideration of the surface transportation authorization legislation, funding was secured for the Institute.

The Transportation Research Institute at KU was designed to establish a nationally-recognized research and development program to form agreements and partnerships with federal agencies, transportation-related companies and suppliers. The Institute will also offer undergraduate and graduate courses and seminars in transportation technology. In addition, the Institute also has the potential to become a tool for regional and national transportation-related industries and offer assistance to government agencies for the development of transportation technologies and economic growth.

### **Visiting Hospitals in Seneca and Clay Center**

I visited the Nemaha Valley Community Hospital in Seneca and the Clay County Medical Center in Clay Center on Friday. In Seneca, I met with Stan Regehr, President and CEO, to learn about this 24-bed facility. This not-for-profit facility focuses on general and pediatric medical and surgical care and obstetrics and has orthopedics and emergency departments. It was nice to visit with the hospital staff including Jan Lueb, Human Resources Coordinator, and Mike Stallbaumer, Director of Information Technology.

In Clay Center, I met with CEO Ron Bender and Director of Marketing Marcia Newell to tour this center, which includes 35 beds, and hear about its expansion project. Key services offered at Clay County Medical Center include general and pediatric medical, surgical and intensive care; obstetrics; and neurology, orthopedics, and emergency departments. I ended the tour at the Wellness Center, where I had a chance to visit with a group of local health care professionals.

I appreciated both Mr. Regehr and Mr. Bender's time sharing with me about each of their facilities and the discussions with trustees, physicians, nursing directors, staff and patients. Physician recruitment, costs of needless regulations and the importance of Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation were the main topics of discussion at each location. CAH designation allows community hospitals to be reimbursed by Medicare at a higher rate. Health care services are vital to the success of our communities and I commend these two facilities for their continuing efforts to provide for their communities and surrounding areas.

**Presenting Barnes Residents with a "Building Better Communities" Award**

On Friday, I recognized the citizens of Barnes for ongoing efforts to sustain and revitalize their community with a "Building Better Communities" award, established to showcase positive community action in Kansas. Despite its small size - 144 people - Barnes is bustling with activity.

The Barnes Community Development Corporation was formed more than 20 years ago to help sponsor important community services and events. In addition, the Corporation operates and supports local entities like the Hometown Cafe, which has been open for more than 10 years, and the Barnes Gym, which hosts Bingo every week and is utilized for wedding receptions, programs, plays and other community events. The city council has rehabilitated eight homes and demolished five old structures in the last few years and community members, the local Lions Club and a local Master Gardener all pitched in to rehabilitate the Barnes I.O.O.F. Park. The community is protected by a strong 20-man volunteer fire department and adult mentors provide area youth opportunities to gather and grow through community service projects at The Refuge, a faith-based youth center.

The city maintains an extensive website with a list of 26 businesses and organizations, which includes three antique shops, three churches, two bed and breakfasts, two automobile repair shops, two building contractors and a plumber. Another local, family-owned business in Barnes is Our Daily Bread Family Bake Shoppe and Bistro. It started out of a two car garage in 2002 and has since moved into a historic century old downtown building where homemade meals are served to visitors from near and far.

The residents of Barnes have continuously worked together to ensure their community will survive and prosper into the future. Former mayor Charlie Hern, local bank manager Deb Kruse, city treasurer Gloria Moore, and Cindy Hiesterman of Our Daily Bread Bake Shoppe and Bistro are only a few of the many local residents taking positive action to move their community forward. I admire their dedicated effort. Barnes is a shining example for rural communities in Kansas and across the nation.

For full text of my speech recognizing the community of Barnes, [click here](#) .

### **Participating in Ellinwood's After Harvest Parade**

I joined residents of Ellinwood this weekend for the community's 33rd Annual "After Harvest Parade." The annual festivities, presented by the Ellinwood Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by Barton County Feeders and Sunflower Bank, began Thursday with a barbecue, quilt giveaway and ice cream social and continued through Saturday with its downtown parade. I enjoyed the opportunity to visit with many Ellinwood residents and thank Marsha Johnson for driving me in the parade.

### **In the Office**

Mike and Rhonda Good of Parsons were in the office this week to discuss legislation that protects the public from dangerous large cats like tigers. Mike and Rhonda are the parents of Haley Hilderbrand, who lost her life to a tiger at a USDA-certified facility in 2005. Earlier this year, Kansas passed "Haley's Law" that prohibits contact with dangerous wild animals. I support similar federal legislation. My deepest sympathy goes to Haley's parents and I appreciated the opportunity to hear their story.

Monsignor John Weber of Salina and Nancy Daniels and Colette Hernandez of Topeka were in to talk about the value of Head Start programs, how S-Chip and Medicaid help working families provide healthcare for their children, and the importance of funding programs that impact children. Bill Greving of Phillipsburg was in representing the National Sorghum Producers to discuss the status of trade negotiations and issues regarding loan deficiency payments.

Members of the Kansas Corn Growers were in the office to express their support for legislation that recently passed the House, which continued congressional support of ethanol, and to talk about the next farm bill. In with the group were Brian Baalman of Menlo, Dan Guetterman of Bucyrus, Bob Timmons of Fredonia, Bill Pauly of Denton, Johnathan Robinson of Fall River and Charles Foltz and Jere White of Garnett.

Gina Bowman-Morrill of Kansas City was in with Coffeyville Resources to describe her company's current projects, including a refinery expansion at the company's Coffeyville facility. Greg Krissek of Wichita was in the office to tell me about the National Ethanol Vehicle Coalition and its current programs aimed at encouraging ethanol infrastructure, such as the addition of



E-85 pumps at Kansas gas stations. I am the sponsor of legislation that gives incentives to gas station owners to install alternative fuel systems.

Erika Lacy of St. Francis was in the office to share what she learned during her participation in the Presidential Classroom program. Lindsay Astleford of Dodge City was in with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council to learn more about my role as a Member of Congress. In with the Kansas Wildlife Federation was Troy Schroeder of Albert to explain the Wildlife Federation's legislative priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill.

Members of the Kansas Soybean Commission were in to discuss legislative priorities for the upcoming farm bill, continued biodiesel incentives, estate tax reform and trade policy. In with the group were Bob Henry of Robinson, Craig Gigstad of Winchester, Terry Reschke of Hiawatha, Kenlon Johannes of Topeka and Dennis Hupe of Perry.

Several people from Hays were in my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Patricia, Christa and Bailey Barker; Kyle and Debra Ermoian with sons, Devin, Taylor, Joshua and Jacob; and Vickie Unruh with her children, Kathryn and Ryan.

Very truly yours,

Jerry